
Interfaces of meaning: Modelling register and genre in a stratified system

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This paper explores how the interface between context and language can be conceptualized within systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), with particular focus on the theoretical grounding of register and genre. Rather than treating them as labels applied post-hoc to texts, SFL models register and genre as emergent, patterned configurations of meaning, grounded in a stratified and semiotically organised system in which context and language are dynamically co-instantiated (Halliday 1999; Taverniers 2021).

The starting point is the SFL hypothesis that language is plurifunctionally organised: all languaging simultaneously engages ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning. These metafunctions align with subsystems in context (field, tenor, mode) and provide the basis for modelling context–language coupling (Hasan 2014). Building on this foundation, the paper proposes a modelling approach in which the interface between language and context is mediated by **multiple semogenic timescales** (Taverniers 2021), from moment-to-moment interaction to more slowly evolving cultural patterning. These timescales are integrated through the principle of **instantiation**, and further underpinned by the concept of **metaredundancy**, which accounts for the probabilistic coherence across strata and timescales (Lemke 1984; Halliday 1991; Taverniers 2019).

Within this framework, **register** is modelled as situated sub-potential, i.e. a probabilistic co-selection of contextual features within recurrent situation types, while **genre** reflects higher-order regularities in semiotic practice. Their relationship is not taxonomic but stratificational and dynamic, arising from recurrent couplings across these timescales. SFL offers modelling tools that align empirical variation patterns with a theory of language as a semiotic system, enabling a principled interpretation of register beyond surface features.

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